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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Saturday, August 6, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Office of Information, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Time was when sickness was a personal matter. But today many countries consider it a national affair -- or better, they consider health a national affair. Many a government today is promoting a program for a stronger and healthier race. And here in the United States -- but there. Our Washington reporter brings you the recent national health news in her letter today.

She writes: "Washington is a great place for meetings and conferences. During the course of a year hotels seem to be continually overflowing with delegates to one meeting or another -- beekeepers or D.A.R.'s, diplomats, lumbermen or legionnaires or any other national group.

"But during the last fortnight there was a 3-day conference here which should be of interest to every American, rich or poor, especially interesting to the young mother living on a farm far from a hospital or doctor, or to the small-town wife with a sick husband and an income too small to pay for a much-needed operation. This recent National Health Conference was the first of its kind ever held in the United States. The delegates were physicians, agricultural experts, labor leaders and others with a direct interest in bringing the cost of medical care within the means of the majority of the population. They met to discuss a vast far-reaching national health plan -- a 10-year plan to look after the health of all American citizens.

"The conference dates back to August 1935 when the Social Security Act had passed and the President appointed a committee from different Government departments -- a committee on health and welfare to bring the benefits provided for by the Act to the men, women and children in need of them. This health and welfare committee in turn appointed a group of experts to make a survey of our national health needs.

"So at the recent meeting the investigators brought in their findings and gave their recommendations for improving present health conditions. Some of the most interesting facts, I thought, were those reported by Katherine Lenroot, Chief of the Children's Bureau. She began by saying that one of the most shameful wastes in this country today is the waste of lives of mothers and children. She said that about 14 thousand women die each year in this country from causes connected with childbirth and that a great many of these are entirely unnecessary deaths. Nearly a quarter of a million women do not have a doctor when their babies are born; 15 thousand babies come into the world only by the help of neighbors and relatives, while 223 thousand babies are born with only ignorant, untrained midwives in attendance. Only a seventh of the babies born to farm families are born in hospitals. And about 200 thousand babies of rural families are born every year in homes at least 30 miles from a hospital.



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"Miss Lenroot went on to say that we have the medical knowledge today that would save a great number of our present deaths among mothers and babies. The trouble is that too few people can benefit from this knowledge.

"You may be interested to know that in more than 1000 counties there is still not a single public health nurse for rural families. In some places there is only one such nurse to look after 25 thousand people or more. No wonder the infant death rate in the country is higher than the city. It is, you know -- has been since 1929. Many women on farms are too far from a doctor or can't afford prenatal care or hospitals at the time the baby is born. These are just a few reasons why the Technical Committee recommended that the Government spend more to save mothers and babies.

"Some interesting facts about children's health needs came out at the conference, too. Poverty and sickness are likely to go hand in hand. And the children in families with incomes of less than a thousand dollars a year are more likely to be sick and to go without medical care than children in more prosperous families or even than children in relief families. By the way, did you know that almost a third of our population, or probably 40 million people, have yearly incomes of less than 800 dollars? That sum doesn't leave very much to pay for doctors and hospitals when the rent, food and clothes are paid for.

"About 88 thousand American children under 15 years die every year. Pneumonia and influenza still take the heaviest toll with dysentery and similar ills next, and accidents ranking third. Infectious diseases like measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and scarlet fever still account for 14 thousand children's deaths and heart troubles and tuberculosis cause 4 thousand a year apiece. Of course, these figures account for only a small number of the children who have these diseases. Many more recover though they may suffer permanent health injury. Many deaths, much ill health or lifelong handicaps among children could be prevented by more health centers or clinics where children could get prompt diagnosis and treatment, better control of communicable disease, better protection of the milk supply, systematic health supervision and more medical and hospital care for the families that cannot afford it under our present system. About two-thirds of our rural areas have no children's health centers at all.

"As for hospitals, here again the farm family is at a disadvantage. In large cities the poor may get as good care as the rich because of the number of free clinics, free hospital beds, and so on. But in smaller towns and rural districts the poor especially have very little hospital care in proportion to their needs.

"I can't write you in one letter more than brief scattered notes on all the health facts reported at this conference. But isn't it a cheering thought that this meeting may start our country toward a great conservation of life and health such as we have never had before?"

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